D. D. KOSAMBI, DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

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Social sciences in India today are virtually gripped by waves of indigenization. The disciplines of sociology and social anthropology are no exceptions to this trend. Search for alternative conceptual tools and theoretical approaches seems to have developed a kind of xenophobia towards the so-called imported concepts and theories. "So called" — because 'materialist thinking or interpretation' has not been alien to the indigenous philosophical tradition in India. However, dialectical materialism and class-analysis, which are now attributed to the Marxist intellectual tradition, evoked considerable resistance in the Indian intelligentsia in general and social scientists in particular. The resistance could also be due to the earlier link up between Marxism and Communism, when it one was a Marxist one was also generally a member of the Communist Party of India. Thus, 'intellectual Marxism' was practically unknown. The initial neglect of D. D. Kosambi's brilliant works cannot be explained otherwise.

That there is a renewed interest in Kosambi's studies in Indian history is evident in the institution of a memorial lecture series in his name at the Bombay University and an occasional lecture series in Poona as well as in the publication of collections of his writings (e.g. DDKHS, SSP). Though this late recognition is visible in the professional circles of historians in India, other social scientists, particularly Indian sociologists and social anthropologists have seldom turned their attention to Kosambi's insightful sociological analysis of ancient Indian society, culture and civilization. Partly this was due to sociologists lack of familiarity with the enormous historical evidence that Kosambi marshalled from his investigations of the proto-historic and ancient period, and partly due to their late realisation of the relevance of history itself for a sound sociological understanding of Indian society.

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As it is now a commonplace argument, any revolution in scientific thinking and knowledge comes about not through the accumulation of data alone but primarily through a change in the paradigm[1]. What matters is the type of questions an analyst raises or hypotheses one formulates. Kosambi's achievements lie precisely in his path-breaking formulations that brought a major shift in the paradigms that were in vogue in Indian history (Thapar 1980 : 365-66). The purpose of this paper is to put together Kosambi's ideas on science and history, his understanding of dialectical materialism and his rigorous attempts to apply it to the understanding of Indian society — its structure and dynamics through history. Quintessentially this exercise is more compilative rather than evaluative in nature. It has been attempted with a view to draw attention to serious applications of the Marxian paradigm by a non-practicing historian and sociologist whose writings can provide important directions to cognitive structures of Indian sociology and social anthropology. Part I of this paper deals with Kosambi's views on science and history as well as his exposition of 'dialectical materialism' as he understood it. His analysis of the Indian society — its structure and the stages of its historical development — has been summarised in Part-II. Part-Ill concludes with Kosambi's major contribution to social analysis.

I

Kosambi viewed science and society as closely interrelated. To him this dictum was true as much of social history as of Marxism as a science. Great scientific discoverers and discoveries can not be separated from their social context social environment. For the understanding of social history, Kosambi stressed the most fundamental relationship between great discoverers and their social environment. Conservatives take history as the personal achievement of great men, specifically the history of science. 'The Marxist tradition, however, asserts that the great man is he who finds some way to fulfil a deep perhaps unstated social need of his time' (DDKHS : ix). Therefore, Kosambi argued that 'no Marxist would claim science to be independent of the social system, within which the scientist must function' (SSP: 12). He thus takes a definite and

an unequivocal materialist position in the sociology of knowledge.

If Marxism is to be treated as a science in its own right, then it must be recognised that its distinctive method of ana lysis is the method of dialectical materialism. Like G. Lukacs, (1971 : 2-24) even Kosambi thought that 'dialectical materialism contained the essence of Marxism'. It is a complete science — an analytical system and set of principles for organising know ledge — which is known after the genius who first developed its theory and used it systematically as a tool of social inquiry (EE : 1). In elucidating the basics of dialectical materialism, Kosambi followed the standard texts. According to him, dialectical materialism, holds that matter is the most primeval and substantive reality whose properties are inexhaustible, whereas mind is simply an aspect of matter, being a function of the brain. Following Marx's logic in turning the Hegelian idealism upside down, Kosambi also asserted that 'far from being primary phenomena, ideas are mere reflection of material processes and changes upon human consciousness which is itself a material process' (EE : 1).

Materialism thus constitutes a complete philosophy and the most coherent theory of history. The basic concepts that form integral parts of this Marxist framework, are elucidated by Kosambi with relative ease and characteristic clarity. 'Matter itself is not inert', he said 'but in a constant state of interaction and change; it is a complex of processes and unfolds its inexhaustible properties in its interaction with environment'. In every stage, Kosambi stresses, there resides an inherent quality of change, an "inner contradiction" which leads eventually to a negation of that stage or condition. Highlighting the dialectics as a law of development, he further points out that the negation is quite naturally again negated'. There is thus a fundamental unity of opposites. 'Life is a mode of existence of certain forms of matter. Its characteristic mode of existence is that, in order to preserve its special quality as living matter, it has to interact with a suitable environment. In the context of human life and society, this environment is furnished to a large extent by the society itself (EE : 1-2).

Since man cannot exist without bread 'an aggregate of human beings becomes a society when and only when the people develop the most essential relations — i.e. relations developed through production and mutual exchange of commodities'. Kinship is not as essential a relation as are production relations. The rate and the quantity of interaction of men with natural surroundings depend on the techniques of production. This implies that the surplus production depends upon the *means of production*. The method by which the surplus passes into the hands of the ultimate user is determined by and in turn determines — the form of society, the *relations of production* (CCAI: 10-11). It means that the distribution of the surplus (product) among the various members of society is a matter for the relations of production (EE : 2). What matters is 'who owns the tools, the land, who controls the disposal of the surplus, and who regulates quality and form of supply'. Therefore, society is held together by bonds of production' (Preface, AISIH : xii-xiii). Hence, far from depicting materialism as a source of destruction of human values, as its critics often did, Kosambi thought that it actually showed how human values — whether divine, moral or legal — are related to contemporary conditions of social existence This formulation of Kosambi was clearly a cogent restatement of some of the key propositions from Marx's famous preface to — *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (c.f. Marx.: 1977b : 19-23).

It is these materialist premises that underlie Kosambi's conception of history also. To him history was not simply narrative chronology — of episodes, dynasties and kings or tales of war and battle. History is a reconstructed profile of society — a chart of societal development. At any rate Kosambi never believed that this process of development could ever be fully understood by mere study of philosophical systems — however great or lofty these might be (MR : 1). He therefore defined *history 'as the presentation, in chronological order of successive developments in the means and relations of production* (AISIH: 1; CCAI: 10). The production relations could be found at the root of several Indian myths and ritual practices only if the analyst cared to trace them. However although Kosambi had decried the neglect of such materialist

analysis, he also warned historians against "crass materialism" which can be no substitute for a systematic understanding of Indian culture and society (MR : 2).

Since all historical reconstructions have to depend on intrinsic source — material, what truly matters is the quality of sources. In general available source — material is inadequate, at times even poor in India. Any exclusive reliance on either epigraphic finds, archaeological excavation work, or on numismatic data, or philological and euhemeristic reconstructions, according to Kosambi, would not take us very far if each of these is used to the exclusion of others. The best course open while attempting historical reconstruction is to combine all of these sources whenever they are found to *be* these may have to be further reinforced by ethnographic and anthropological field studies too (SSP: 10). But the focus unquestionably has to be on 'identifying successive developments in the means and relations of production. It is these which truly mirror the life people lived at any period. (AISIH : 3-6). Kosambi had thus made his choice in favour of a 'purely materialistic reconstruction of history and of stages of societal development'. The choice is justified on the grounds that man has all along been making himself by using tools (of production) in order to live increasingly well at the cost of his environment. And with every new basic discovery in the means of production follow important social consequences like sudden rise in the human population etc. Moreover, 'no social organisation can be more advanced than the instruments of production will allow' at that point of time (AISIH : G-7). Even this position of Kosambi is in conformity with the classical Marxian proposition that 'stages of societal development necessarily correspond to the stages of development of mode of production (Marx, 1977)b : 19-23). The long quotation from Karl Marx's preface to his *Critique of Political Economy* cited by Kosambi (AISIH : 9) confirms that this approach to the study of Indian society culture and civilisation, through comparative historical reconstruction, implied a clear-cut and definite theory of history known as dialectical materialism, also called Marxism' (AISIH : 8).

What pace do studies on religion, superstitions, rituals and

myths have in the study of the material foundations of any societal development? In this regard Kosambi has warned us against excessive concentration on the study of such super-structural categories as it would inevitably lead us away from history. But this is not to suggest that superstructure ought to be neglected. Ideas are important but not in themselves; they are important as products of certain types of social structure and hence can be used as source-material for deducing both information and insights about social structure. Sometimes, material changes in the forces of production may have to be reconstructed, or even extrapolated from 'what survives as marks upon the ideological superstructure'. Ideas too develop into a force once they have gripped the masses; these supply the form in which men become conscious of their conflicts and fight them out. (c.f. K. Marx 1977a : 133-57 and *Manifesto:* 57-63). Studies in superstructure sometimes do reveal the real changes occuring in the base. Thus, studying tribal cults or tracing a local god through village tradition can give a priceless clue to ancient migrations, primitive tracks and trade-routes and the merger of cattle-breeding tribesmen with food-gatherers which led to firm agricultural settlement. (SSP : 11)[2]. What is most striking is that even after adhering to the basic Marxist methodology of analysing the base-superstructure relationship, Kosambi affirms his conviction that 'Marxism is not a plain and simple economic determinism as its opponents often take it to be'. Instead he projected it more as an 'intelligent determinism that discusses *conditions* rather than *causes* and one that takes full cognizance of the course of historical development'. (AISIH : 9-10).

On the question as to whether Marxism is a deterministic system of analysis Kosambi has clarified his position thus :

> "Our position has also to be very far from a mechanical determinism particularly in dealing with India, where form is given the utmost importance while content is ignored. Economic determinism will not do. It is not inevitable, nor even true, that a given amount of wealth will lead to a given type of development. (Hence) the complete historical process through which the social form has been reached is also of prime importance" (CCAI : 12).

This position of Kosambi is only a restatement of the clarification F. Engels offered in his letter to J. Bloch, suggesting that the materialist conception of history implied 'production and reproduction of real life as the *ultimately* determining element in history' and that more than this neither Marx nor he had ever asserted (Marx and Engels, 1958 : ii 488). Therefore, Dale Riepe (1974 : 42) preferred to describe Kosambi as a 'cultural determinist rather than an 'economic determinist'[3] Kosambi only believed that economic considerations are enormously important even in the explanation of religions. 'Being a histomat Kosambi tended to emphasise productive base as a source of explanation rather than putting emphasis on the superstructure' (Riepe, 1974: 42).

All that Marx wrote was not taken by Kosambi as sacrosanct. Adoption of Marx's thesis does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions. Sounding like a true nonconformist Kosambi particularly cautions a scrupulous student of Marxism as a scientific methodology and theory of history not to confuse it with those of the official party-line Marxists. Similarly Kosambi always emphasised the distinction between Marx's interpretation of Western society and that of Asian society. Whereas his substantive concern was with the former, he only used the Asian setting for occasional illustrative purposes. At any rate the general theory of history founded on dialectical materialism is independent of the two concrete settings. Writings on these may reveal certain misjudgements or lacunae which ought to be understood in terms of social conditions in which certain interpretations were offered whether on European or on Asian societies. Therefore, without an iota of hesitation a Marxist Kosambi dismisses some of Marx's writings on India — particularly the formulations in the context of the Asiatic mode of production — as 'misleading' (AISIH: 10-11). For constructing a Marxist theory of Indian society Kosambi thought, Marx's writings on the Asiatic mode were not particularly relevant or germane.[4]

No science and scientific theory provides the last word in the quest for knowledge. Marxism as a scientific theory must not be an exception to this basic premise in the philosophy of science. To Kosambi what was needed was a *sensible* extension

of Marxian theory by taking stock of later studies under Marx's direct inspiration. Here Kosambi has cited Engels' famous study of the nature and decay of tribal organisation, of property relations and the way he demonstrated how forms of family, marriage and the state corresponded to types of property. (Engels 1957). Only more rigorous and systematic applications help us to weed out some of the redundant conclusions of Marx of Marxism to modern discoveries will yield new results, would help us to weed out some of the redundant conclusions of Mark and would ensure further enrichment of Marxism as a scientific theory (AISIH : 13). In this matter party hardliners often tend to take Marxism as an inelastic, inflexible and irrefutable law of social development. This attitude practically turned 'a science' into 'the dogma' which Kosambi always found irreconcilable with his positivist and scientific convictions. He was also conscious of the fact that the conclusions of his studies on ancient Indian culture and society, based on a rigorous application of the 'mode of production' — framework would have a mixed reception because of his repeated references to Marx. Because 'Official Marxists always looked with suspicion upon the work of an outsider' (SSP : 11).

About his intellectual commitment to Marxism, Kosambi made no secret. On the contrary he proudly proclaimed it. In his letter to Dr. Daniel Ingalls, Kosambi has presented his classification of the intelligentisia vis-a-vis Marxism. Kosambi has divided the World into three groups : those (i) swearing by Marxism, (ii) swearing at Marxism, and (iii) indifferent i.e. just swearing, but forced by the crisis to shift to either (i) or (ii). Without mincing words or searching for convenient covers to camouflage his true identity as a scholar, Kosambi placed himself in the first category. (Ingalls, 1974: 29). But far from treating Marxism as a craft for political propaganda, he stressed more on using it sensibly as a scientific methodology.

> "The point ..... is not to prove Marxism or to support it, but to use a certain well-proved line of approach to draw conclusions from (such) meagre evidence as exists" (Ingalls 1974 : 29).

This explains why Kosambi was intolerant toward any

forms of hypocrisy, inefficiency and dogmatism. (Basham 1974 : 18). The dogmatists — both at home and abroad were not spared by him. He unsparingly castigated the orientalists in Moscow as 'pseudo — Marxist Scholars' and the 'nonsense' they produced at the Institute of Oriental Studies. He poured this scathing criticism on Moscow orientalists when Kosambi was in fact a guest of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences. Only a scholar with the courage of his conviction, as Kosambi was, could offer such an 'unusual gift' to his academic hosts ! The Societ scholars of course, did not fail to return the 'compliment'; they thought 'Kosambi's Marxism was only 'skin-deep' (Ingalls 1974 : 31-32). At times even his best friends thought that Kosambi's historical interpretations, particularly those based on statistical analyses of the punch-marked coins, though most convincing, sometimes contained errors and misinterpretations, because he often appeared to be attempting to force his data into a rather doctrinaire pattern. (Basham 1984 : 18). It is indeed beyond our competence to comment on, let alone assess or ascertain, the degree of doctrinaire assertions in Kosambi's historical interpretations on the ancient Indian culture and civilization which he always based on systematic and rigorous use of archaeological and numismatic data. However, if he were really dogmatic or a doctrinaire Marxist, whom something other than a genuine desire to search for truth had motivated to look back on history, he would have exercised a calculated moderation in his criticism of Moscow orientalists, or of 'Official Marxists' at home.

Kosambi's critique of Dange's (1961) book: *India from Primitive Communism to Slavery* was no less pungent. He thought that such a work by one of the founders of the Communist Party to India was 'painfully disappointing' being full of errors of fact and of reasoning and hence replete with "endless confusion" (DDKHS: 7b). Kosambi attributed these errors to Dange's uncritical acceptance of the Sanskrit documents as the best sources for historical investigation. Kosambi refuted Dange's view that 'the concept of *yuga* exemplified the Hindu system of looking at history and that it considered history as being not static but always moving and changing'. To Kosambi this supposedly dynamic "Hindu" treatment of history was the obliteration of all historical content (DDKHS : 71). Kosambi found Dange's characterisation of 'Brahman as

the Aryan commune and *'Yajnya* as its means of production as particularly repugnant.' Pointing out that Rigvedic uses of *brahman* could be, and in fact should be, explained as referring to prayer or to priesthood while *yajna* was the fire sacrifice, Kosambi asserted that a ritual cannot be a mode of production though ancient man must have understood magic and ritual as helping to increase production'. Hence Dange's interpretation of *brahman* and *yajnya* as primitive Aryan commune with the collective mode of production was dismissed by Kosambi as ridiculous' (DDKHS: 74-75). Equally unpalatable and unacceptable to him was Dange's view that the *varna* system was a later development representing a division of labour and that *Dasyus,* frequently referred to, in vedic literature, were pure chattel-slaves. On the contrary Kosambi stressed the fact of some form of coercive mechanism — the state was always visible in the *vedas* which implied some form of class division as well, whether fully crystallised or not. Therefore, the formation of the Shudra as a social category, into which a large portion of the *Dasyus* were thrust, actually prevented the development of real slavery in India. Kosambi then suggests that because of the *Caste-varna* system India had helotage, not slavery (DDKHS : 76-77; AISIH : 196-97). Forms of slavery actually increased in India only after 'feudalism from above' was introduced. We shall return to this point later.

II

This brings us to the basic structure of Indian society and the stages of its development through history as Kosambi viewed them. The most important clues to the understanding of this development in the Indian past was the basic factor of transition from a tribal structure — a pre-class social formation — to caste structure. According to Kosambi what primarily accounted for this transition was the introduction of plough agriculture which changed the system of production. It could now produce surplus which, in settled village commmunities, became profit for the priestly class. This is how, he argues, the changed system of production broke the structure of tribal and clan organisation and made caste an alternative social organisation (AISIH : 24-25; CCAI : 170-71). Tribal clans and totems changed into caste names. Since brahmanical settlements were the chief agency

through which basic changes in agricultural production were setting in, this process of transformation inevitably led to eventual absorption and assimilation of tribal local cults into the brahmanical tradition and in sanskritization of folk cults. 'With virtual monopoly over land and ritual Brahminism could peacefully reduce tribes to castes" (AISIH: 317-20). Kosambi has cited numerous examples — one of which pertains to peasant surnames in Maharashtra which show that clantotemic *devaks* survived after the tribal groups had dissolved and merged into castes and subcastes (AISIH : 33)[5].

The caste system since then persisted as, and even now continues to be, the most important aspect of Indian social structure. It is a ubiquitous and powerful institution, particularly in Hindu society although some non-Hindus including Muslims and Christians could not escape its overpowering impact. However, what is most striking is that it has survived the onslaught of Buddhism in the distant past and of Christianity in the more recent one. Kosambi cites examples of 'good Roman Catholics in Goa who regard themselves as *Brahmin* Christians and prefer to take drinking water or food from a Hindu Brahmin but not from a Shudra Christian' (Kosambi 1944: 243). Of course, conversion from a caste-based society would in part account for this phenomenon. But the great diversity of features of the caste system — at the level of both its precepts and practices, is such that any statement of a general nature about Indian castes, according to Kosambi, can be contradicted, whether it is about customs of food, marriage, or about hierarchical ranking based on purity-pollution dimension[6], or even about internal divisions into sub-castes or on occupational differences and specialization (DDKHS: 127-8).

The sources of these contradictions within the caste system are not far to seek. Kosambi argues that 'the caste system was designed to preserve Indian society in a static mould. Its principal function now is the negation of history and therewith the negation of progress' (Kosambi 1941: 245-46). Though in theory the system was rigid and inflexible, its practice varied from region to region depending upon the stage of development of productive forces. For example, the caste system was never strong enough in Kashmir where a developed form of feudalism

emerged. Here Kosambi observes the notorious laxity of observances on the part of Kashmiri brahmins. Apart from this slackness, the *class behaviour* of the brahmins forfeited their sanctity to a considerable extent as most of them were landholders or government officials and had fought on the battle-field, with arms in hand, purely for personal material advancement unconnected with any religious, ritual or theological considerations'. The Kashmiri brahmins had thus acted in history more as a class of holders of land-grants *(agrahara),* as feudal barons fighting against the suzereinty of the central power of the king, paving way for the ultimate victory of feudalism'. (DDKHS: 115-18). The growth of commerce and trade particularly that of the precious saffron, further accelerated the process of weakening of central power and the rise of feudalism. Consequently, the caste system in Kashmir was, in contrast to the rest of India, too thin a disguise for that of classes. The *agrahara* became a hereditary *jagir* form of private property in land (DDKHS: 118).

In Kosambi's assessment, the main features of contemporary Hinduism developed only after the Mohammedan penetration of India. Hence, the Hinduism as we have today is not entirely the same as the religion of the vedic Aryans. Modern Hinduism, along with its caste system, has not only survived the inroads of Islam and Christianity but was entirely transformed by Buddhism that prevailed in India for centuries (Kosambi 1914 : 245-46). The Buddhist philosophy of non-violence, originally borrowed from a much older religion — Jainism, has now become an integral part of Hinduism. The rapid spread of Buddhism, first in India and subsequently beyond the Indian frontier to China, Japan, Asia Minor, Tibet and Mongolia has to be understood, according to Kosambi, in terms of the development of productive relations, trade and the historical tendencies of that period. To him, 'caste in the Buddhist period was quite close to the class system' (Kosambi 1944 : 245), but its stronghold was nearer the Indus-valley region than Magadh as it was more rigid and conservative a system in the former than in the latter. However, despite its contempt for brahminism and for the sacrificial rituals at which brahmins presided as priests, Kosambi argues :

> "Buddhism did not touch the older ritual, nor set up a new one of its own; it worked out a new social scheme without touching caste which would make people more civilized, make it possible for them to coexist with less friction" (DDKHS : 130).

The caste Hinduism could stage a comeback partly because the salient features of Buddhism including the economically dispensable vegetarianism had been absorbed by Brahminism. The capacity for synthesis and assimilation in the caste Hindu society was so profound as to admit Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu (Kosambi 1944 : 247-48). It is this adaptability of the *varna-caste* system that enabled other regions to be opened up. Its flexibility, its post-Buddhist development into a method for maintaining the status of any rule that made nominal concessions to Hinduism, enabled the caste system to survive great changes. Though paradoxical, the progressive function of caste in a sense ended with the establishment of the basic agricultural economy, based on the foundation of the village unit and family as a sub-unit. Thereafter, caste mainly became a stabilizing force, itself attempting to become static.

Kosambi attempted to identify the content and features of development of Indian society through various stages of history. But in doing so he was averse to applying mechanically and uncritically the accepted Marxist periodisation of European history to the Indian past (Thapar 1980 : 377). On slavery — which is the first stage of historical development of modes of production, as the Marxist general theory of history has suggested, Kosambi firmly argued that Indian slavery was not strictly speaking a variant of that ubiquitous, though ignoble, institution in the ancient period. Indian slavery was not even recognisable by the Greek and Roman standards. Chattel slavery could never have had any significant role in production process in India. Though in the classical European economy human beings were traded like cattle for heavy labour in mines and fields, this was never so in India. *Dasa* and Shudra were synonymous. This class of labour was also expropriated by the Aryans but eventually absorbed into the Aryan-fold as a class of servants, bondsmen as helots but not slaves (DDKHS : 82-83).

The feudal mode of production is the only stage of historical development, as periodised by Marxists, which Kosambi accepted as relevant in the Indian context. Even in this regard he did not apply the European model of feudalism blindly; rather he introduced the distinction between 'feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below'. Kosambi thought these were peculiar features of Indian feudalism. 'Feudalism from above' referred to a state wherein a central authority, be it an emperor or a powerful king, levied tributes from subordinate chieftains who were still effective rulers in their own respective territories and who were left undisturbed so long as they paid the supreme central authority. 'These subordinate rulers managed the land administration in their jurisdiction directly without a class of revenue tax collecting intermediaries' (AISIH : 295-96). This is the kind of feudal formation that, according to Kosambi, developed through changes which came about in the late first millennium A.D. subsequent to the Gupta period (Thapar, 1980: 378-79). Indian feudalism therefore differed substantively from its European counterpart — which he characterised as 'feudalism from below'. It implied a class of landowners developed within settled village communities, between the state and the peasantry, gradually wielding armed power over the local population. It is this class which is the *de facto* ruler in the local communities and which claimed a direct relationship with the state. The relationship was reciprocal — the state conceding (rather helplessly) the right of tax collection by small intermediaries who passed on a fraction to the feudal hierarchy in contrast to the direct collection by royal officials in 'feudalism from above' (AISIH: 295-96). In return the feudal lords furnished military assistance to the state whenever required.

The similarity between the European and Indian variants of feudalism was found in that in both the cases techniques of production were simple, being at a low level of development: production — largely individual in character — was for the immediate subsistence needs of a household or a village community. Also there was increasing commodity production. But. 'demesne-farming on the lord's estate by compulsory labour service' — a key feature of European feudalism-was decidedly not true of India. Political centralization was common to both India and Europe and so was conditional holding of land by

lords on some kind of service-tenures (particularly noticeable among Rajput chiefs and among the earlier Muslims, whose chiefs were invaders). But, all lords were required to serve and their *jagirs* shifted from time to time. Parasitism of courtiers, whose offices were seldom hereditary, practically bordered on a new form of slavery (DDKHS : 93-94). A more striking difference lies in the fact that patrimonial justice, which formed a part of the lord's functions in the European model, was either absent or developed only in parts of India where village councils could be displaced by lords possessing armed forces of their own (AISIH : 353-55).

Kosambi pointed out three more notable features distinguishing Indian from European feudalism; the increase of slavery, absence of guilds, and the lack of an organised church (AISIH : 355). However, growth of castes, and the rapid transformation of tribal into caste structures obviated the need for both guild and church. But with the expansion of caste and settled self-sufficient agricultural communities the commodity production went down per head of population. Hence, feudalism from above became necessary for increasing commodity production to match the steadily growing trade. The traders themselves could not have fulfilled this need except when they turned *barons-a*. term that has specific meaning in European history. Hence, private landowners and[or the feudal barons became necessary in India. (DDKHS : 101). This explains further why 'slavery became more prominent than before in Indian feudalism. Without being indispensable to the means of production the slaves formed the nucleus of the man-power that the barons needed to make them independent of the peasantry. They were used not only as specifically privileged armed retainers, but also as commodity producers — particularly of cloth and other specialised goods — at least a part of which was traded either directly by landlords or barons themselves or through dependent trading class. To supplement the paid labour feudal landlords often preferred to cultivate special plots of land for themselves and their families, but with deployment of this slave (bonded) labour instead of leasing out the land to peasant-tenants' (DDKHS: 102). In Kosambi's view all these features of Indian feudalism appeared on the scene during the 14th century in the reign of Firuz Tughlaq (DDKHS: 102)[7].

Indian feudalism did not fail to produce its own ideology. In his papers on the *Bhagvad Gita* Kosambi has attempted to show how this sacred document propounded the concept of *bhakti* — laying emphasis on unquestioning faith in and personal loyalty and devotion to a deity. These values were in conformity with the ideology of feudalism. It did not challenge any preceding doctrines except vedic *yajna* (CCAI: 206-07) but *Gita* could not promote any fundamental change in the means of production either. Instead 'it furnished one scriptural source in which anything could be read without denying the validity of a class system, and without violence to accepted brahmin methodology' (DDKHS: 165-69). Kosambi has argued that the essence of fully developed feudalism is the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord and baron to king or emperor. Such a social structure had developed in India only during or after the 6th century A. D. and to hold this type of society and its state together the best religion is one which preached devotion and loyalty. *Gita* was thus a logical performance for the early Gupta period in which its message of *bhakti* and personal faith served the purpose of sustaining feudal society (CCAI : 208). The text emphasised caste functions and preached an ethic which required people to perform their ordained duties even during periods of frequent and deepening crisis (DDKHS : 180-81) to ensure increased commodity production that had begun to decline with the rise of caste system and self-reliant village communities. It was the ideological basis of Indian feudal society (CCAI: 208). Therefore, although the later *bhakti* — devotional — tradition, from Samkara (C.A D, 800) through Dnya neshwar, Tukaram and other saint poets down to Tilak and Gandhi, became a powerful instrument of mobilizing various social groups (Thapar 1980 : 368) it could not truly transform the social consciousness of the lower classes (AISIH: 127-28).

The third major stage of development, namely the bourgeois epoch in Indian history, according to Kosambi, coincided with the British rule. In studying this modern phase he applied the conceptual categories of class-analysis again drawn from Marxism. The growth of the class of indigenous bourgeoisie was facilitated by preexisting compredor elements. Kosambi has mentioned people from Gujarat, Kathiawad and Kutch, who

were not necessarily traders, but are occupying a prominent place in the capitalist class in post-independence India. This was possible largely because their early contacts with Mohammedan traders and rulers enabled this small fraction to develop early contacts with the British, and thereby introduced them to the new system of production; i.e. production based on machinery and modern capital (EE : 12-13). Parsis are the best example of how a minority community could become the most advanced, cultured and powerful, first as compredors and later adopting modern industrial and finance capital. Marwaris for a long time confined themselves to financing and money-lending though lately they too turned towards industrial manufacturing. What struck Kosambi most is the remarkable unity of class interests of the Indian bourgeoisie (CCAI : 2-3). In contrast there has been a progressive deterioration in the living conditions of peasantry, factory workers, low-paid office workers and intellectuals. It was the Indian bourgeoisie which was primarily interested in building a strong nationalist movement to counter the growing hegemony of the British bourgeoisie. This was possible only by establishing an axis with peasant masses in the countryside and working class in cities. The Congress under Gandhi and Nehru, to Kosambi, had basically served as a bridge between the Indian bourgeoisie and the masses. With the transfer of power it is the Indian capitalist class which has monopolised power (CCAI : 3-6). Kosambi is therefore highly critical of Gandhian leadership of the mass movements of the 1920s and 1930s as well as of Nehru's development planning in the first decade and half after independence. (EE : 6-9, 10-18).

A gradual decline of feudalism was the corollary of the rise of bourgeois capitalism in India under the British rule. In 1857 Indian feudalism did try its strength against the British bourgeoisie but unsuccessfully. The post-Mutiny years saw the same feudal elements and *rajas* seeking British protection, privilege and patronage. Some of them, of course, moved into entrepre-neurial industrial ventures and joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Even those who were liquidated after independence through a series of progressive legislation received fabulous compensations. In short, although formally Indian feudalism declined, 'the old ruling class was partially amalgamated into the new'. The two World Wars had accelerated this process

which was only completed after the independence (DDKHS : 133-36).

In general, Kosambi's treatment of the bourgeois epoch of Indian history has streaks of populist assertions. Unlike his analysis of the earlier stages of development of Indian society — and social structure in which his analytical insights are not only matched but even excelled by the meticulously collected evidence from archaeological, numismatic and ethnographic investigations, his study appears to have been fashioned primarily on the famous work of R. Palme Dutt's *India Today*.[8] Although Kosambi's observations on the capitalist stage of societal development in India are substantially correct, as several later studies have proved them to be, his style of argument while dealing with the bourgeois, capitalist phase departs considerably from the canons of scientific rigour that he had adhered to in his works on ancient and early medieval periods of Indian history.

III *Conclusion*

This shortcoming, however, must not. detract us from Kosambi's otherwise brilliant attempts to use 'dialectical materialism and class analysis' — i.e. the Marxist paradigm in systematically understanding the structure and dynamics of Indian society. It needs, however, to be stressed that Kosambi's originality lies not only in his bringing about a major shift in paradigm, from chronological narrative to comparative analytical history, or in his cogent demonstration of how stages of societal change and development correspond to the successive stages in the development of means and relations of production as all Marxist analysts do, but mainly in his three contributions, or in the points he emphatically made. They are : (a) First, thai positivist empiricist spirit is inescapable for building a sound understanding of complex social phenomena. Ideas/interpretations and facts considered in isolation from each other are of questionable validity. Hence, even Indology-more specifically that branch dealing with interpretation of ancient texts — and linguistic studies of problems of ancient Indian culture would be more fruitful if supplemented by archaeological, sociological, anthropological, numismatic and ethnographic evidence and

vice-versa. Available data in each of these fields ought to be augmented by a great deal of honest and competent field work. None of the various techniques can, by itself, lead to any valid conclusion about ancient India; combined empirical operations are indispensable'[9] (b) Secondly, Marxian dialectical materialism as a general theory and philosophy of history is unquestionably a useful paradigm with profound explanatory potential regardless of stages of societal development one addresses oneself to. However, the Marxian paradigm must not be mechanically applied to the understanding of Indian social reality. Facts will be the ultimate arbiter, and this dictum is doubly true in understanding a socio-culturally plural as well as complex Indian society. Studies of Superstructure are therefore equally relevant and useful provided they adopt the dialectical materialist model sensibly (c) Hence, finally neither Indian scriptures nor Marxism is sacrosanct; an analyst must continually separate myth from reality and endlessly discover innovative potentialities that the practice of synthesising the two offers in understanding the structure and dynamics of Indian society.

In addition to these it must also be stressed that for Kosambi the dialectical understanding of the historical development of Indian society is not just a plain and simple exercise in the "so-called" value — neutral science. To him, 'the specific feature of Indian history — (viz.) progressive exploitation of the worker under a dual burden of caste and class — cannot long remain buried under such vainglorious praise of Indian "culture and philosophy"; it will not prevent the internal struggle for maturing all the more rapidly' (DDKHS : 71). Being a Marxist by-conviction, a robust optimism pervades Kosambi's views on future transformation of Indian society. He accepted Marxism not just as a scientific discipline that aids only in the interpretation of the past, but also as a living discipline which must continually work successfully with newer discoveries to serve as a guide to future action (EE: 2-3). Therefore, in stressing that 'it is doubtless more important to change history than to write it' (CCAI : Preface, xi) Kosambi was only emphatically reiterating the famous Marxist dictum. He certainly implied that historiography as an intellectual craft — itself a social product — ought to promote that internal struggle and contribute to the development of transformative forces from within.

These points deserve the serious attention of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists. By acquainting themselves with the Marxian paradigm as used with rigour by Kosambi, they have much to gain both in substantive, theoretical and in methodological terms.

Abbreviations used for D. D. Kosambi's Works

AISIH : *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*

CCAI : *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*

DDKHS : *D. D. Kosambi on History and Society* (a volume edited by A. J. Syed).

EE : *Exasperating Essays*

MR : *Myth and Reality*

SSP : *Science Society and Peace* (a collection brought out by the Academy of Political and Social Studies. Pune).

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NOTES

1. This position is taken on the basis of£ T. Kuhn (1970).
2. Kosambi has demonstrated this ably in his study of "Mother — Cult-Sites". See MR: 82-109.
3. Riepe's formulation 'cultural determinism' is in a sense begging the question, for, how does one define 'culture? In Kosambi's view, conceptualisation of culture was inseparable from the productive forces and processes of their development.
4. For details of Marx's writings on India, see S. Avineri (1969).
5. More examples of these are available in Chapter-II in AISIH. Also see R. Thapar (1980 : 371-2).
6. This aspect of caste system in India has been specifically highlighted by Louis Dumont (1972).
7. The basic question is : Did this feature of what Kosambi saw as 'Indian' variety of feudalism apply to all parts of the country or even to the predominant areas? Of late this question has been debated among historians. Its scope and magnitude prevent us from examining it in detail within the ambit of£ this paper.
8. We are offering this more as a studied guess. Because nowhere in his works Kosambi ever cited R, Palme Dutt's writings, which may also be because of his aversion for "OMs" — official Marxists. But the tenor of Kosambi's characterisation of the Indian bourgeoisis and its linkages with the Indian National Congress, has a striking resemblance with Palme Dutt's. For details see R. Palme Dutt (1947).
9. See D. B. Kosambi (1974 : 1-27).

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